Does a Vegetable Garden Save Money?

Many folks take it for granted that growing your own vegetables saves the household money. It is possible, but not reality for most of us who garden as a hobby. Here are my ideas on the topic.

Because of the efficiency of world-wide agricultural production and distribution it is difficult to grow vegetables in a home garden that save money over supermarket-purchased vegetables. The real value to home gardening is the exercise and satisfaction provided by that activity. That being said, a careful gardener can produce crops that approximate the costs of supermarket vegetables.

There are things to do to reduce the cost of growing vegetables in the home garden

* Manage the space that you have available. If the soil is poor and/or space is limited use raised beds and intensely manage their use to have crops in play during the whole season.
* Complement the characteristics of your soil, climate, and habitat. Select varieties that can prosper in the conditions that exist. Long-season indeterminate tomato varieties do not work in San Antonio, Texas, but 2 smaller crops can be harvested by using fast-maturing determinate varieties for crops in the spring and fall. Length of the growing season, pH of the soil , moisture patterns, temperatures, insect pressures, and disease prevalence all affect which varieties to use and when to plant. Such information is readily available on plant\_\_\_\_\_\_.com and other sources.
* Plant vegetables that your family will consume in the quantities that they will use. Wasted vegetables are a net loss. Distribute excess produce to friends and your local Food Bank.
* Manage the cost and effectiveness of water by using drip irrigation. Vegetables respond better with less water and costs for water can be reduced by 50%.
* Use the plant source method that reduces costs and best matches the time you have available to garden. Large transplants are much more expensive than seeding vegetables if you have the time and patience to nurse the plants along from germination to harvest.
* Only use pesticides (organic or manufactured) if absolutely needed. Target specific pests and only use the amount and application method required on the label.
* Fertilizers are also expensive and some sources are more expensive than others. The best “rule of thumb” is to divide the cost of a fertilizer product with the amount of nitrogen that it provides. Slow-release lawn fertilizer is usually a good value and works well.
* Take advantage of cooperative gardening opportunities. Grow the vegetables you grow best and trade extra production with other gardeners. Gardeners can also share seeds and transplants to address minimum purchasing requirements.
* There are some vegetables that are perennials. One planting results in production year after year with minimal costs.
* If your soul and climate allow it, grow high-value vegetables. The value of vegetables can change seasonally depending on world or national weather patterns.

Which vegetables are likely to grow in a home garden at a cost less or near the price of supermarket produce? It depends on your climate, soil, and other conditions, but here are some ideas to consider.

* Fresh herbs are needed in limited amounts for home recipes, but are sold in relatively large bunches at the supermarket. Growing your favorite herbs can meet your cooking needs at less cost than buying herbs at the supermarket. Parsley, sage, rosemary, and chives are among the herbs that can be grown year-round in some climates. Cilantro, basil, and many other herbs can be grown as a seasonal crop.
* Asparagus is consistently expensive in the market. Once planted and provided minimal attention, the perennial vegetable provides production year after year in a diverse set of climate and soils.
* Tomatoes, the price of this popular crop fluctuates considerably from year to year. This also a vegetable that most consumers believe tastes better if homegrown.
* Lettuce is a short season perishable crop that is grown across many climate zones. Bad weather can change the price within days. Harvested as needed from your own garden, the leafy selections can stabilize your costs for a relatively long season.
* Peppers are a relatively expensive vegetable used in limited quantities by most families. A few plants in containers or the garden can produce all the peppers needed over a long season. The plants are attractive on the patio, so do double duty as an ornamental.